

House Bill 4259 is in the best interest of Michigan's children. By extending legal recognition of the parent-child relationship to *both* adults raising a child, this bill ensures that more children will benefit from having the financial, legal, and emotional security of two parents.

There is urgency to the need for stable and secure adoptive family homes. Right now more than 4,000 children in Michigan's foster care system are waiting for adoption. Many others live in homes with two adults who function as their primary care providers, but these children do not benefit from legally protected relationships with both of their parents. We know that stable and secure relationships are always in children's best interests. House Bill 4259 addresses these needs by aiming to expand the pool of available adoptive homes, and by ensuring that more children benefit from the many protections afforded by having two legally recognized parents.

As a child psychologist and a developmental researcher, I know, firsthand, of the importance of parental care for children's development. Stable and secure parent-child relationships are the foundation for children's developmental success. They promote literacy and school achievement. Success in adolescence also requires the active involvement and monitoring of parents. Indeed, our ability to grow into productive, contributing members of adult society is based primarily upon the emotional, practical, and financial security provided by parent caregivers earlier in life.

When parent-child relationships are compromised, child well-being suffers. We know that the vast majority of children who enter foster care after their twelfth birthday will leave the system without returning to their original homes, and without being adopted. They face higher rates of homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, and early pregnancy. Young children who enter foster care may linger in the system, with multiple placements over the course of years. Because of the emotional trauma this type of disruption represents, these children face enormous hurdles. We need to do better for these children. We need to increase the availability and enhance the stability of adoptive homes. House Bill 4259 will accomplish this, and will create opportunities for success for more of Michigan's children.

House Bill 4259 enhances both parents' legal status with the children in their care, thus protecting children in the event of the death or separation of the parents. It is no surprise, then, that second parent adoption has also been publicly endorsed by so many prominent organizations concerned with children's welfare. Among these are the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, the Michigan chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Child Welfare League of America.

House Bill 4259 is in the best interest of Michigan's children. It will increase the availability of adoptive homes, reduce costs associated with the foster care system, and will provide many children with critical legal and financial protections. As we enhance the stability and security of parent-child relationships, we ensure the future success of our children. House Bill 4259 is an important step in that direction.

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